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Chairman: Mr. Maitland ..... (South Africa)

Contents

Agenda item 76 : United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East *(continued)*

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Agenda item 76: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (continued) (A/57/13, A/57/282, A/57/294, A/57/338, A/57/455, A/57/456, A/57/462)

1. **Ms. Costa** (United States) said that the United States was profoundly concerned about Palestine refugees' humanitarian needs that were being served by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

2. The contribution made by the United States in 2002 to the UNRWA budget¼almost US$ 120 million, of which $ 30 million had been earmarked for emergency UNRWA operations in the West Bank and Gaza¾reflected the profound commitment of the United States to the well-being of the Palestine refugees. The United States had made the largest contributions both to UNRWA's regular budget and to its emergency appeals. During the past year, the Israelis and the Palestinians alike had suffered the effects of terrorism and deteriorating security. The situation had posed important challenges to UNRWA.

3. Even under the present difficult conditions, UNRWA must continue the process of management reforms. There was no doubt that UNRWA had already achieved some success in that regard. The United States felt that effective management reform should also involve measures geared to bolstering UNRWA's contacts with those interested in its activities. Strengthening such contacts could only improve the situation of the Palestine refugees.

4. The United States would support all the resolutions considered under this agenda item if the primary emphasis of their language would be on the humanitarian problems of the refugees and on UNRWA's assistance to them.

5. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon) said that, although UNRWA had been created as a temporary institution for providing assistance to Palestine refugees, today, more than half a century later, the General Assembly had been forced to renew its mandate again, because of Israel's refusal to implement resolutions of international legitimacy requiring that the refugees be afforded the right to return to their homes.

6. Israel was not only causing enormous suffering to the millions of Palestine refugees that it had expelled from their land, but was also intentionally depriving them of an income-generating capacity, which is a violation of basic human rights. There had been assaults on Agency staff, as well as on refugee camps. Refugee camps and Agency facilities had been destroyed. Agency-built schools had been used as prisons. Restrictions had been imposed on the movement of Agency personnel. Furthermore, Israel had not paid what it owed UNRWA. Based on that, Lebanon was appealing to the international community to continue to exert pressure on Israel to refrain from imposing restrictions on Agency staff and destroying Agency facilities. Israel was obliged to pay the Agency all that was owed and to comply with the provisions of relevant international agreements.

7. The refugee problem was one of the primary features of the Palestinian problem, particularly for Lebanon, where some 387,000 Palestinians lived, accounting for 10 percent of the country's total population.

8. Lebanon's position on the problem of the Palestine refugees was rooted in resolutions of international legitimacy, and that position was reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at an ordinary session of the Council of the League of Arab States at the Summit Level. The right of the refugees to return to their homes and property had to be enforced. Lebanon rejected any form of permanent settlement of the refugees in its territory, because that would contravene the provisions of the country's constitution. In addition, from a geographic, demographic, and economic standpoint, the number of Palestine refugees exceeded Lebanon's capacity to absorb them; moreover, the Palestine refugees did not want live in the camps permanently and insisted on their right of return, their right to self-determination, and their right to create their own independent State.

9. Lebanon again declared the importance of the Agency continuing its work to register refugees and keep track of them and issue identification cards that would enable them to maintain their status as refugees and Palestinian citizens.

10. In conclusion, the Lebanon delegation again declared that the only way to solve the refugee problem would be to eliminate the underlying causes, chief

among which was the occupation. In that connection, the international community should obligate Israel to choose peace and recognize all the resolutions of international legitimacy, withdraw its troops from all the occupied Arab territories, create the conditions necessary for the return of the refugees, and guarantee the Palestinians the exercise of their rights to self-determination and the creation of their own independent State.

11. **Mr. Takahashi** (Japan) said that Japan attached great significance to the activities of UNRWA, which was the principal international organization providing humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees and thereby contributing considerably to regional stability.

12. Japan was deeply concerned over the difficulties and hardships experienced by the refugees in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA personnel were also facing increasing difficulties and problems such as the difficulty associated with obtaining access to those in need and coordinating Agency activities with those of other organizations providing humanitarian assistance on the ground.

13. The Government of Japan again appealed to the Israelis and the Palestinians to break the continuing cycle of violence. In particular, it called on Israel to exercise maximum self-restraint in the use of force, and on the Palestinian Authority to do its utmost to suppress extremist acts.

14. The question of stability in the Middle East as a whole was vitally important to Japan. Japan's recent focus had been on assisting the reform the Palestinian Authority, which was of vital importance to the long-term consolidation of peace and prevention of conflicts. Japan was prepared to cooperate with the parties, as well as with other members of the international community, to implement the vision of the two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure, recognized borders, as envisioned in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002).

15. Japan was determined to continue to provide maximum support to the Palestine refugees, and it hoped that the Agency would continue its efforts to perform its work efficiently and effectively.

16. **Mr. Kasoulides** (Cyprus) said that Cyprus appreciated the work of UNRWA, which, under adverse conditions, had continued to implement its programmes in education, health care, and the provision of relief and social services for more than 4 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic and in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as had taken measures to reduce the suffering caused by hostilities, closures, restrictions, and harsh security measures.

17. Maintaining close, friendly ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors, Cyprus sincerely hoped for lasting peace and security in the Middle East and was firmly convinced that the backbone of the economic and social structure had to be preserved for the Palestinian people. As for UNRWA's activities, Cyprus was deeply concerned about the financial difficulties faced by the Agency in carrying out its programmes and meeting the minimum needs of the refugees.

18. Cyprus firmly believed that work towards peace would be resumed and that history would not repeat itself. UNRWA's role today was even more crucial. Agency operations should be a secure financial footing, and Cyprus was joining the appeals for additional and increased contributions to assist the Agency in resolving the current situation and to help millions of suffering Palestinians. Cyprus had joined the appeals for additional and increased contributions as a result of the recent crisis, and it was prepared as before to implement its own private relief plan, which included technical assistance programmes and training for Palestinian officials and civil servants in Cyprus as soon as the situation returned to normalcy.

19. **Mr. Musambachime** (Zambia), referring to the suffering of the Palestine refugees, noted that more than 250 West Bank villages were not linked to the general water distribution network and experienced water shortages on a regular basis, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. To offset that problem, they collected water during the winter from their roofs and stored it in underground tanks. During the summer, the water ran out, and more had to be brought in by tanker trucks. That system worked relatively well, but with the frequent closures, which cut many villages off from the outside, and the prolonged curfews and restrictions placed on the movement of people and vehicles, a serious water shortage was looming. The actions of the Israeli forces, which were disrupting UNRWA work to provide Palestinians with needed services, including the provision of water, were aggravating the situation. The Agency was unable to deliver humanitarian supplies to its distribution centres, and Agency facilities such as

schools, training centres, and medical facilities had been destroyed by Israeli forces. In that connection, UNRWA and all States Members of the United Nations should ensure that the Agency could perform its functions unhampered, and Zambia called on the Government of Israel to stop destroying UNRWA facilities and disrupting its operations.

20. The encouraging developments with respect to UNRWA's regular cash budget of should be noted. At the same time, according to the Commissioner-General's report (A/57/13), donor pledges to the Agency's 2002 budget left a gap of $ 37.9 million, and Zambia supported the Commissioner-General's appeal for additional pledges to cover that deficit. In that connection, the Zambian delegation wanted to express its appreciation to the governments of the countries listed in table 10 of the report and to the European Community for the contributions they made, as well as to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States, and the European Community, whose combined contribution amounted to more than half of the contributions for the current year. Furthermore, the responsibility for supporting UNRWA's work was borne by all countries, and Zambia strongly appealed to States Members in a position to do so contribute generously. In addition, it called upon the States of the Middle East to demonstrate their political commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people in practical terms. The Zambian delegation believed that raising their combined contributions to half the UNRWA budget would not only be of great political significance, but would also greatly improve the Agency's financial situation.

21. **Mr. Ahsan** (Bangladesh) said that the Commissioner-General's report had provided information on Agency activities and on important Agency achievements. Given the current situation of continuing violence and violation of the norms of international law, those achievements deserved wholehearted approval. At the same time, the Agency had to cope with numerous and varied problems in performing its mandated tasks. The report clearly said that those problems were the result of Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territory and the violence used by the Israeli armed forces. The continuing interference of Israeli forces in UNRWA's activities had taken on new forms. They were taking over schools and using them as detention centres, preventing ambulances from moving patients, and killing UNRWA staff members, as well as damaging Agency infrastructure and restricting the movement of its staff members and materials.

22. Those and many other acts referred to in the report pointed to a calculated effort to politicize and belittle the role of an organization that was performing a noble humanitarian function. The international community should condemn such practices, and Bangladesh called on Israel to put an immediate halt to those of its actions that contravened the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, and the 1967 agreement between the Government of Israel and the Agency.

23. In addition to an increase in the number of refugees, the Agency was faced with a number of problems that had strained the Agency's capacity to provide services. Palestinian job losses, the deterioration of the economy, the costs of repairing Agency infrastructure, and, above all, the slow response to Agency appeals for its emergency assistance programme in 2002 were also among the factors that were making UNRWA's work more difficult.

24. Despite that, the Agency had continued to perform its functions selflessly and use innovative approaches. In that connection, the speaker wanted to make several specific points. First, in education, the performance of UNRWA schools was praiseworthy, despite the suspension of the educational process as a result of military operations. A programme had been developed to make up for lost time, and an educational project promoting tolerance and nonviolent means of conflict resolution had gotten under way. Second, a microfinance and microenterprise programme, which was an effective means of expanding opportunities for the populace, especially women, had been implemented. Third, faced with restrictions imposed on the movement of people and humanitarian cargoes, the Agency had implemented the operations support officer programme in the West Bank, which helped ensure the movement of UNRWA staff and vehicles. Fourth, the speaker felt it appropriate to mention the Agency's cooperation with other United Nations agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund in areas such as health care and education. In working with those agencies, as well as with the United Nations Development Programme,

the Agency had managed to meet the immediate medical and health needs of the inhabitants of areas that had suffered as a result of the actions of Israeli forces.

25. At the same time, financial difficulties and the disruption of the peace process seemed to be requiring that the Agency adopt different strategies. UNRWA, for example, was working ever more vigorously to create local capabilities, expand opportunities for the refugees by providing microcredit, and make community-based organizations more responsible for providing social services.

26. Bangladesh felt that the assistance provided by the Agency was helping to strengthen the morale of the Palestinians, and the Agency needed all the support available in this difficult time. While commending the donor countries, Bangladesh also felt it should note that solving the problem of the shortage of funds in the regular budget required that additional resources be provided and that UNRWA's appeals for emergency assistance be responded to.

27. **Mr. Maso** (South Africa) commended the Commissioner-General and his staff for the work they were doing under extremely difficult conditions that involved a dramatic worsening of the political, social, humanitarian, and economic situation in the occupied territories and said that his country was seriously concerned about the effects of the curfews and closures on the economic conditions in the occupied territories, especially the increase of unemployment and poverty to unacceptable levels. Also distressing were the reports of the dramatic deterioration of the provision of medical services to the Palestinians, which was largely due to the closures and curfews, which were hampering the provision of medical and health services and were precipitating a rapid worsening of the situation involving water supply and sanitation. The results of a recent WHO survey, for example, indicated that almost half of young children and women of child-bearing age suffered from anemia and that malnourishment among children had increased markedly.

28. Under those conditions, the services provided by the Agency to the Palestinian population were becoming vitally important, in connection with which South Africa condemned those of Israel's practices that were hampering the movement of UNRWA staff and materials, as well as the destruction of Agency infrastructure and facilities and their use as detention centres. South Africa called upon Israel to fulfill its obligations under international law, particularly the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations of 1946 and the bilateral agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

29. The South African delegation was also concerned about the Agency's financial predicament and firmly supported the Commissioner-General's appeal to major donors to work to assist UNRWA in meeting its vital needs.

30. In July 2002, the Government of South Africa had facilitated the delivery of medical supplies to Palestinians. Humanitarian goods were collected by South African civil society groups as a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people, who were suffering immensely under the military occupation of their land.

31. The crisis would ultimately be resolved when Israel ended its occupation of the Palestinian territories and when the Palestinian people exercised their right to self-determination. In that connection, South Africa once again declared that it was in favor of creating an independent Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem and appealed to Israel to leave the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, dismantle the Israeli settlements, and effect a fair solution of the Palestine refugee problem in keeping with the 11 December 1948 General Assembly resolution 194 (III). South Africa believed that lasting peace, security, and stability could be achieved only through peaceful negotiation and the assurance of the inherent right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of an independent State. The land for peace formula remained relevant, and implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002) was, as before, the only basis for achieving a just and comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East.

32. In conclusion, the speaker noted that the closure of areas, the blockade, and the restrictions on the movement of goods, people, and resources were acts of collective punishment prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the international community must ensure compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population under the current conditions.

33. **Mr. Al-Shamlan** (Kuwait) made special note of the urgency of the question of the Palestine refugees

and the duty of the international community to provide them assistance until the question was fully resolved. The Kuwait delegation expressed the hope that UNRWA's work would continue and would expand in all five areas of its operations despite the Agency's financial predicament.

34. Kuwait firmly intended to continue to provide economic assistance to Palestine refugees and would earmark $ 1.5 million for funding measures to preserve Arab and Islamic culture in Jerusalem, as well as for providing material support to families of Palestinian martyrs. In addition, Kuwait would pay its contribution to the UNRWA budget. The harsh measures undertaken by Israel since September 2000, which it justified with considerations of national security, were causing the Palestinian people to suffer and were hindering the work of UNRWA.

35. Kuwait declared its complete solidarity with the Palestinian people and called upon Israel to abide by the framework of the peace process defined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the land for peace formula. Regarding an overall settlement, the recent peace initiative put forth at the meeting of the heads of state and government of the Arab countries was a new approach to finding a just, long-term solution that would ensure the rights of both parties.

36. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that the UNRWA Commissioner-General's report had given an idea of the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the difficulties UNRWA had to face when fulfilling the lofty task assigned it. UNRWA's advisory committee had been forced to express its concern over the fact that Israeli practices had engendered a severe humanitarian crisis that manifested itself in the growth of poverty, the deterioration of health, and an increase in the number of children suffering from malnutrition. As for the activities of the Agency itself, he noted cases in which Agency facilities had been destroyed, especially in the Jenin refugee camp.

37. The Working Group on the Financing of the Agency had expressed concern over the negative effects that measures to solve the problem of the chronic shortage of funds had had on humanitarian operations. Also of concern was the less-than-prompt response of the international community to appeals to replenish the Agency budget.

38. Although the Palestine refugee problem was humanitarian in nature, the problem was essentially political, because some parties had refused to comply with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Consequently, UNRWA had become a permanent and indispensable and would remain as such until the Palestine refugee problem was resolved in keeping with the norms of international law.

39. **Mr. Arrouchi** (Morocco) said that UNRWA was a symbol of the international community's commitment to solving the Palestine refugee problem. The Agency was in a difficult situation as a result of Israel's continuing military operations in Palestinian population centres and refugee camps. In that context, the first step of the international community must be to increase the financial resources available to the Agency, which would enable it to take measures to address the growing humanitarian crisis. Morocco called upon UNRWA to keep the donor community informed of its emergency assistance programmes.

40. In addition, the international community must exert pressure on Israel to lift the restrictions on UNRWA's activities and to begin to comply with norms of international law. While the socioeconomic conditions of the Palestine refugees and their housing conditions were deteriorating dramatically, the Israeli forces were purposely destroying UNRWA facilities. Moreover, Israel was arresting and torturing Agency staff. The work of the Agency should be regarded as an integral part of the settlement process in the Middle East, because concern for the Palestine refugees would serve as the foundation for activities after the crisis, which would enable Palestinian society to prepare itself for solving future problems.

41. The world community must adopt measures enabling UNRWA to continue its humanitarian mission without any obstacles until a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestine refugee question is reached, including right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland.

42. **Ms. Price** (Canada) said that, with the situation in the Middle East deteriorating, the world community was obliged to take measures consistent with the overall goal of ensuring that the State of Israel and an independent, viable, democratic Palestine live side by side in peace and security. Based on that, Canada supported several initiatives aimed at strengthening trust between the parties and restoring their faith in the

political process. Canada had expressed its concern to Israeli authorities regarding the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and had constantly called upon Israel to fulfill its obligations under international law, including obligations emanating from the Fourth Geneva Convention.

43. At the same time, Canada condemned terrorist acts against the peaceful populace and called upon all Palestinians to stand against such violence.

44. In those exceptionally trying circumstances, UNRWA showed a devotion to the task for which it was created, providing vitally necessary emergency assistance and services in the most varied of fields. UNRWA played an important role in assisting the formation of a culture of peace in the region.

45. In the current year, Canada had contributed $ 10 million to UNRWA's main budget and had allocated $ 2 million in response to appeals for emergency assistance in Gaza and the West Bank. Canada firmly supported UNRWA's ongoing management reform process, acknowledging at same time the difficulty of the tasks the Agency faced.

46. After two years of bloody clashes, the parties must return to peace. The problems involved were clear, and the compromise solutions necessary for a just and lasting settlement were all still the same.

47. **Al-Harthy** (Saudi Arabia) noted that Israel was trying to solidify its position as an occupying Power, and that was reflected in its policy of repression, murder, closures, and demolition of homes, which was completely unacceptable to the international community. The plight of the population Occupied Palestinian Territory had become catastrophic, disease and poverty was ubiquitous, and people were consumed by fear as a result of Israel's practices there.

48. The tragic living conditions of the Palestinians had been reflected impartially in the UNRWA report presented by the Commissioner-General. The number of Palestine refugees was growing every year and, naturally, the extent of the needs that the Agency had to service was increasing. At the same time, the Agency's humanitarian work was being hampered by the restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation forces in contempt of earlier concluded agreements.

49. Under those difficult and dangerous conditions, UNRWA staff members continued to carry out their noble mission, which deserved all available support. The financial predicament of UNRWA was a cause for serious concern, and for that reason the international community needed to responsibly approach the fulfillment of its obligations to ensure the functioning of the Agency.

50. Saudi Arabia continued to make its financial contributions and donations for the Palestine refugees and provide other assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. Since 1957, Saudi Arabia had donated some $ 62.8 million to UNRWA, not counting the $ 1.2 million it had sent to the Agency budget as its annual contribution. Saudi Arabia had provided the Agency a gratis subsidy of $ 34 million for purposes of implementing development projects. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia expressed confidence that UNRWA would be successful in continuing to provide assistance to Palestine refugees.

51. **Mr. Al-Athba** (Qatar) expressed appreciation to the Commissioner-General and his staff for the work they were doing under extremely dangerous conditions that involved closures and restrictions on the movement of people and goods, all of which resulted in the deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestine refugees. Phenomena such as extreme poverty, elevated unemployment, and cutbacks of education and health-care programmes had become widespread.

52. The General Assembly at the current session continued to consider the question of the Middle East situation. That was occurring at a time when Israeli tanks were besieging Palestinian population centres, and Israeli aircraft were conducting strikes against the civilian population. It should be noted with concern that States were crying out in protection of human rights and the rights of refugees during those discussions, calling upon the international community to provide them with proper living conditions. But those voices were quiet when the topic was the problem of the Palestine refugees, as if those refugees had come from another planet. Many delegations paid lip service to the protection of human rights, but turned a blind eye to the actions of Israel, which was openly violating those rights and was completely ignoring the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international humanitarian law.

53. Qatar strongly condemned Israel's violation of its obligations under those principles and the agreement

reached with UNRWA in 1967. The international community must demand that Israel fulfill those obligations, and in that connection, Qatar welcomed the steps taken by the Agency to alleviate the suffering that the Palestinian people were experiencing as a result of the blockade of the West Bank and Gaza by the occupying Power. Qatar also called upon the international community, especially donor countries, to provide assistance to mitigate the effects of that blockade, make generous contributions toward funding UNRWA programmes, and respond to the appeals of the Agency for emergency assistance.

54. UNRWA was established in 1949 as a temporary agency for providing assistance to Palestine refugees. Despite the fact that more than half a century has gone by since then, the General Assembly has been forced to extend the Agency's mandate, because Israel continued to prevent the repatriation of the Palestine refugees. The refugees have inherent rights confirmed in General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and in all subsequent such resolutions. Chief among those rights is the right to return to their homes or to receive compensation, and any measures aimed at achieving a just and lasting solution of that problem must be based on the provisions of those resolutions.

55. Since reaching a comprehensive settlement of the crisis in the Middle East is impossible with the continuing occupation, the international community must acknowledge the importance of the services provided by the Agency to the Palestinian people in various fields. Donor countries should continue to make voluntary contributions to fund UNRWA's work so that the Agency could overcome the difficulties it was now facing, especially the serious financial difficulties. Effective measures to improve its financial situation would have a favorable effect not only on humanitarian activities in the interests of the Palestinian people, but also on overall stability in the Middle East. In that connection, it should be noted that, until a comprehensive, just, and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III) is achieved, UNRWA must continue to carry out its mandate, and for that purpose it must be allocated all necessary financial resources.

56. Qatar commended UNRWA and its staff, who, risking their lives, provided humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians who needed it the most. In that connection, the Qatar delegation wanted to point to the need for emergency measures to effect the removal of the restrictions placed on the movement of UNRWA staff and materials in keeping with the agreement between the government of Israel and the Agency and with the principles of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

57. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) noted that the preceding speakers had clearly defined the many bloody problems in the region served by UNRWA, touching upon, in particular, questions pertaining to settlements, curfews, closures, assassinations, and suicide bombings. The Holy See understood that the current situation had a pernicious effect on the lives of a large number of people. In its work, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine relied heavily on interaction with its many partners who were providing it financial support for assisting the Palestinian people, especially those living in refugee camps. The funds of its annual budget of $ 10,720,000 were being earmarked for projects in such areas as employment, village restoration, and education and health care.

58. In his sermon on the Annunciation, read on Sunday, 11 August 2002, Pope John Paul II emphasized the hopelessness of violence as a means for solving the Israeli-Palestinian problem. No one could remain indifferent in the face of the mounting humanitarian tragedy. The international community must help the Palestinians and Israelis understand that the injustice that underlay the conflict and was the cause of the unending exchange of retaliations must come to an end. The findings of the Mitchell report of 6 May 2001 clearly indicated that the root cause of the suffering both of the Israelis and the Palestinians was Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. The international community was obliged to help to ensure that both parties took the path of sincere negotiations, because the massive use of violence had produced nothing and only exacerbated the suffering of the Israelis and the Palestinians. It made sense to once again recall the public appeal for reconciliation made by the late Israeli prime minister, Itzhak Rabin, in 1993.

59. The delegation of the Holy See hoped that any solution of the multifaceted problems of the region would take into account the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. The Holy See once again repeated its regular call for the adoption of internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion

and freedom of conscience of the city's residents to safeguard the special character of that city and the sites sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The current wave of violence was preventing pilgrimages to the Holy Land and was depriving local believers of access to their places of worship. The delegation of the Holy See called for strengthening international solidarity and the political will to eliminate the root cause of the violence, which was bringing suffering primarily to the civilian population and children.

60. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) summarized the findings of the Commissioner-General's report on the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a result of the massive military operations conducted by the Israeli occupation forces. The measures used by the Israeli government were not only worsening the crisis in the Palestinian economy, but were also hampering UNRWA activities. Those and other of Israel's practices were at variance with the principles of international law and numerous international agreements. Moreover, according to some reports, the Government of Israel was trying to exert pressure on several large donor countries to abandon financial support of UNRWA.

61. It was regrettable that the international community, particularly the Security Council, had failed not only to persuade Israel to lift the restrictions on the movement of Agency staff and materials, unblock closed areas, and lift the curfew on Palestinians, but also to provide protection for the Palestinians against the continuing Israeli aggression. Given the vitally important role of the Agency in providing essential services to Palestine refugees and alleviating their suffering, the international community should increase its contributions to the Agency budget so that the Agency could continue to implement its programmes and provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people.

62. The summit-level Islamic Conference, as well as the conferences of Islamic States at the ministerial level, affirmed that the Palestinian population, wherever it might be, would remain within the sphere of responsibility of UNRWA until the refugee problem was resolved on the basis of the refugees' right to return to their homeland. As long as Israel continued its occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and its aggression against the Palestinian people, the prospects for peace in the region would become increasingly remote.

63. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, according to the Israeli representative's statement, hundreds of thousands of Jews had allegedly been forced to flee countries in which they had lived for centuries. Such a claim had no basis whatsoever, since the facts indicate that the Jews who had left the Arab countries had done so voluntarily and of their own volition. In that context, it should be noted that Israel was vigorously working to encourage Jews living in other countries of the world, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, to return to Israel. Intensive work to that end was under way particularly in the Russian Federation, Belarus, Poland, and other countries.

64. Contrary to the assertion of Israel's representative, Lebanon welcomed the presence of numerous communities of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the country. The Jewish community had been officially recognized as one of the denominational groups in Lebanon and was participating in parliamentary elections, the most recent of which had been held in 2000. The problem at hand was not in the faith of the Jews, not in Judaism, but in Israel's occupation and position. Proof of that was the most recent summit of French-speaking countries, which was held in Lebanon in 2002 on the topic of the "Dialogue of Cultures."

65. The Israeli representative's remarks suggested that, rather than following the example of Israel and accepting and resettling the Palestinians in Arab countries, the Arab States were doing nothing to improve the plight of the refugees. Israel recognized every Jew as an Israeli, no matter where he was from. Arabs, however, acknowledged that Palestinians were Arabs, but first and foremost they were Palestinians. Consequently, they must return to their homeland in Palestine. The Israeli statements were insulting to all present, because all the General Assembly resolutions and the Committee resolutions since 1948 contained an appeal to Israel to allow the return of the refugees to their homeland.

66. Lebanon's position was well-known and had been set forth in the statements of the representatives of that country. It was based on General Assembly resolutions, particularly resolution 194 (III), and Security Council resolution 237 (1967).

67. Israel's representative seemed to have no sense of shame. Israel had expelled Palestinians from their homeland and was now crying crocodile tears about Arabs not making the required contributions towards funding the Agency. One needed only to turn to the UNRWA Commissioner-General's report to see that that was at odds with reality.

68. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Israeli representative's statement was replete with misleading assertions. Linking Palestinian refugee camps and the problem of terrorism, as the Israeli representative did, was ridiculous. The representative had tried to distort the facts and justify Israel's barbarous policy with references to the fight against terrorism and to self-defense. Before the formation of Israel, the region knew no terrorism. Occupation was just another name for terrorism. Resistance to occupation was a right secured in all international documents. The events occurring in the Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and in Gaza were atrocious war crimes indicating that terrorism, destruction, and the extermination of people were integral components of Israeli policy.

69. Israel was trifling with the truth when it said that Arab States had expelled Jews from of its territory. Arabs and Jews had lived in peace and harmony for many centuries before the policy of Israel and its leaders forced many Jews to leave Arab countries voluntarily and of their own volition. The speaker was not surprised at Israel's accusations that the Syrian Arab Republic was not trying to provide assistance to Palestine refugees. Arabs had accepted their brothers - the Palestine refugees - lovingly and with care, but did not want the Palestine refugees to reside in their countries permanently, because that would enable Israeli settlers from other countries to take over the refugees' homes and property.

70. The hostile tone of the address of the Israeli representative was a reflection of the extremist position of the Israeli Government, which chose not to recognize the United Nations resolution or the norms of international law. Israel's intransigence was the reason that a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace had not yet been achieved in the Middle East. The speaker called upon Israel to do away with the policy of falsifying and distorting facts, recognize General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and put an end to the practices that ran counter to United Nations resolutions and the norms of international humanitarian law.

71. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it was becoming increasingly difficult for UNRWA to work, because of the difficult circumstances in the area of operations as a result of Israel's practices as an occupying Power. Israel bore responsibility for the grave political and humanitarian situation in the final analysis. Palestine refugees faced the problem of hunger because Israel would not allow them to earn a living and was depriving them of access to food. It was destroying their homes and property and using heavy armaments and excessive force against refugee camps.

72. The main problem was that Israel was continuing to violate the norms of international and humanitarian law. The suicide bombings deserved condemnation, but were a result, not the cause, of occupation. Despite that, Israel would have the international community believe that it was not indifferent to the plight of the refugees and that it was cooperating with UNRWA and not hampering its work. UNRWA was a United Nations agency and was carrying out its mission in an exemplary manner, despite all the difficulties, which is why it must be afforded the same respect as other United Nations agencies and must not be slandered by Israel simply because it was providing assistance to a populace Israel found undesirable.

73. The plight of the Palestine refugees had remained unresolved now for more than 54 years because of Israel's intransigent position and its denial of the refugees' right of return to their homeland and their right of restitution of property or, for those who did not wish to return, to receive compensation. Israel's assertions that it had made a reasonable proposal to solve that problem were untenable because they did not met the minimum requirements for Israel's acceptance of responsibility for the situation at hand. Israel had asserted that it had an inherent right to live in a Jewish, democratic State. But did Israel thus have the right to deny such rights to the Palestine refugees? The Palestinians were ready for a peaceful settlement of the problem through negotiations, but that would require radical changes in the practices and policy of the occupying Power in the matter of returning to a negotiating table where all serious questions could be resolved. With regard to that, the rights of the Palestine refugees were clearly defined by international law, and that would have to serve as a starting point for any quest for a just and long-term solution through negotiations.

74. **Mr. Mekel** (Israel) said that all the speakers had refused to acknowledge that Israel's actions were not taking place in a vacuum. The Palestinian refugee problem had been spawned by violence and by the rejection of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 and Israel's very right to exist by the Palestinians and the Arab States. Seeking to subvert that resolution by force of arms, seven Arab States had invaded Israel in a war that the then-Secretary-General called the "first armed aggression since the adoption of the United Nations Charter." As a result of the aggression, hundreds of thousands of people became refugees. Some of them were Palestine refugees, some of them were Jews expelled from the Arab countries where they had lived for hundreds of years.

75. More than 50 years later, Arab States were insisting that others bear the burden of that problem, despite the fact that, in historical and moral terms, it was their responsibility. Unlike Israel, the Arab States had kept the Palestinians in poverty and without rights. One of the delegates yesterday said that his government regarded the refugees "as if" they were citizens. Except in one Arab country, Palestine refugees were not issued passports, could not travel abroad, and could not apply for jobs or education. Why had they not given the Palestine refugees all the rights and privileges to which they were entitled under international norms and standards and not provided them with a decent life? The current discussion was further proof that political considerations were taking precedence over humanitarian considerations in the Palestine refugee question.

76. Some representatives were accusing Israel of attacking UNRWA personnel. That was not consistent with reality. Israel supported the mission of UNRWA and was working closely with it. Those who posed a threat to UNRWA personnel were the Palestinian terrorists who were in the refugee camps and who were using refugees as human shields and the camps as bases for terrorist acts. At the same time, the blame for the consequences of those actions rested with those who responded to those acts. Such a tactic encouraged others to commit similar actions. That waswhy it was necessary to assign the responsibility to the real perpetrators. The day before, yet another suicide terrorist had blown himself up in a shopping centre in Israel. He had been a resident of the Balata refugee camp. Two people died and more than 30 were injured as a result of the terrorist act. The speaker called upon the international community to condemn the criminal use of the refugee camps by the Palestinian terrorists.

77. Israel agreed that only a peaceful settlement could solve the problem. Israel was ready for negotiations and called upon the Palestinian side to abandon the hopeless campaign of terrorism and come to the negotiating table. Until the terrorists acts ended, Israel would have no choice but to take steps to protect the civilian population. Israel supported the humanitarian mandate of UNRWA and would cooperate with the Agency to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Terrorism posed a threat to the Agency's humanitarian mission, to the Israeli and Palestinian citizens, and to peace.

78. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he was in complete agreement with the Israeli representative's statement that the Palestinian refugee question did not come out of nowhere. It was the result of the occupation. As for the statement that Arab States had refused to comply with General Assembly resolution 181 (II), he expressed doubt that Israel itself had agreed to do so. If it had, why then did Palestinians control less than 10 percent of the territory, and not 22 percent, as called for in the resolution, and why had Israel and Lebanon fought in the village of Malykya, which had originally been part of the land allocated to the Palestinians?

79. Returning to the question of why Arab States had not provided Palestine refugees living conditions consistent with international norms, he asked why Israel had not allowed the refugees to return in keeping with international norms. As for Israel's statement that it had not attacked UNRWA personnel, he cited in rebuttal the Commissioner-General's report, which had said that Israeli troops had employed weapons against Agency personnel, as a result of which one Agency staff member had died.

The meeting rose at 12:35 p.m.